AN EPISTE OF LOVE,

TO THE

Churches of Chriſt

EVERY WHERE;

Exciting to Love, and Charity, and Holy Living.

By BENJAMIN HOLME.

Follow Peace with all Men, and Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord. Looking diligently, leaſt any Man fail of the Grace of God, leaſt any Root of Bitterneſs ſpringing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled, Heb. xii. 14, 15.

But to do Good, and to communicate forget not, for with ſuch Sacrifices God is well pleaſed. Heb. xiii. 16.

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AN Epiſtle of Love TO THE Churches of CHRIST, &c.

Dear Friends,

WHOM the Lord has called to be Witneſſes for His Name and Truth, I hereby tenderly ſalute you, with Deſire that you may anſwer the Call of the Lord, by an holy and humble walking before Him, while you have no Being here, that in the End you may have the Evidence of His Favour and Love in your ſelves.

And I deſire, that you, who have made any Progreſs towards the *Spiritual Canaan*, may be encouraged to hold on your Way; and if you meet with Difficulties and diſcouraging Things in your Travail and Paſſage through this World, have a Care that you do not look out at them, leaſt the Diſcourager prevail to weaken you in your ſpiritual Travail. But when Things

look hard and difficult, let your Eye be to Him who is All-ſufficient, who divided the Waters of old for His People *Iſrael*, and who remains to be what He has always been to His faithful People, *a God near at Hand, and a preſent Help in every needful Time of Trouble*; ſo that there is great Encouragement for ſincere Minds ſtill to truſt in him, who has ſaid concerning the true Seed, *Heb.* xiii. 5. *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee.* We read that the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, but he that endures to the End, the ſame ſhall be ſaved: Many that have made good Beginnings, and run well for a Time, for Want of Watchfulneſs, have miſcarried, and gone into diſhonourable and reproachful Things, whereby the Way of Truth has been evil ſpoken of.

It is certain, that they who have begun in the Spirit, may fall ſhort of Salvation, if they do not continue to follow the Lord, we read concerning *Caleb*, that he *followed the Lord fully*; and although the People of *Iſrael* had been mightily favoured, yet many of them forſook the Lord, but good *Joſhua* ſaid, Joſh. xxiv. 15. *But as for me and my Houſe, we will ſerve the Lord*, he and

and *Caleb*, who were Men of right Spirits, entered the *Holy Land*.

It is not what Men have formerly ſuffered or gone through upon a religious Account, that will render them acceptable in the Sight of God, if they do not continue in well-doing to the End, *for if the righteous Man turn away from his Righteouſneſs, and commits Iniquity, all his former Righteouſneſs ſhall not be remembred, but for his Iniquity that he hath committed, he ſhall ſurely die*; therefore it is good for him that thinks he ſtands, to take Heed leaſt he fall, for no Man is longer ſafe than he is upon his Guard; and if you are careful, that you may be found living agreeable to the Divine Will, and walking as becomes your Holy Profeſſion, you will be greatly bleſt, and He that was *Abraham's* Shield, and his exceeding great Reward, will defend and preſerve you, as you abide in His Fear and Counſel, and in obeying of the Lord, you will enjoy great Reward and Peace, beyond what Tongue or Pen can ſet forth.

And my Friends, where any of you are called to ſuffer upon a religious Account, I would have you to ſuffer cheerfully, like the true Believers we read of, that took

joyfully the ſpoiling of their Goods, being thankful that they were not only accounted worthy to believe, but alſo to ſuffer for the Sake and Cauſe of Chriſt; let no Intereſt prevail with you to go againſt Conviction, to avoid ſuffering for ſome that have ſinned againſt Knowledge, and have taken indirect Ways to avoid ſuffering, have brought a great deal of Guilt upon themſelves, but follow thoſe Things which bring Peace, that when ever it ſhall pleaſe the Lord to call you hence, it may be a happy Change to you.

And as it has been a very humbling and afflicting Time in divers Parts of the Nation, and in many People's Families, becauſe of the great Mortality that has been of late, I very much deſire, that you may be careful to make a right Improvement of the Time and Opportunity which is put into your Hands, that you may be prepared to meet the Lord; and as you find, that it was according to Divine Direction, that *Hezekiah* ſhould ſet his Houſe in Order, for the Prophet told him, that *he ſhould die and not live*: Now, although it is a prudent Conſideration for People to take Care to ſettle their Affairs by *Will*, or otherwiſe, in Time of Health, to prevent Diſcord and

Misunderstanding, that has often happened for Want of such prudent Care, yet I desire that you may above all make it your Care, to have all in Order in a spiritual Relation, that when ever it shall please the Lord to call you to give an Account of your Stewardships, you may give it with Joy, like the good Servants whom we read of, that had improved their Talents.

AND as it is one great Part of the *Christian Religion*, to be full of Bowels and Compassion to them that are in Want and Distress, I desire that you whom the Lord has blest with a plentiful Share of this World's Goods, may be full of Pity to the Poor and Needy, for I count it is a great Blemish upon the rich Man that we read of in *Luke*, that he did not shew Compassion to the poor Man who was laid at his Gate full of Sores, and desired the Crums that fell from his Table, but we do not find that they were granted to him: When the Apostle *James* describes true Religion, he saith, James i. 27. *Pure Religion and undefiled before God the Father, is to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep our selves unspotted from the World*. May you all shew forth

the Truth in the Purity of it, that you may be as ſo many Lights and Way-marks in the ſeveral Places where your Lots are caſt.

And my beloved Friends, I tenderly deſire, that you may manifeſt your ſelves to be truly and indeed the Followers of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by your loving one another, and living agreeable to His Holy Doctrine, whoſe Followers you profeſs to be, who taught his Diſciples not only to love one another, but alſo to love their Enimies, and to do Good for Evil, and to bleſs them that curſe them, and pray for thoſe that did deſpitefully uſe them; and as Diſcord in Families, and amongſt Relations, and Neighbours, has often had mighty pernicious and bad Effects, I deſire that you may guard againſt *Tale-bearing*, and all Things that may tend to make Strife, and if any that have not Government and Command of their Tongues, ſhould revile you, learn of Him, *viz.* the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who when He was reviled by evil and wicked Tongues, did not revile again, but let it be manifeſt, that you have got Command of your Tongues and Tempers, we read, that *he that governs his own Spirit, is ſaid to be ſtronger than he that takes a City*, and

and the wiſe Man ſaith, that *a ſoft Anſwer turns away Wrath.*

As the Holy Scriptures are ſo full of Inſtruction, I wiſh that you may be very frequent in reading, or cauſing them to be read in your Families: And dear Friends, I tenderly deſire that you may all be careful to keep to the heavenly Salt in your ſelves, that ſo through your keeping to the ſeaſoning Grace of God in your own Minds, you may be inſtrumental to ſeaſon the Minds of your Children and Servants: Let your Words be few and ſavoury, ſeaſon'd with Grace, that they may miniſter Grace to the Hearers; you may aſſure your ſelves, that our Saviour intended to diſcourage idle Talking and fooliſh jeſting, by giving us to underſtand, that a Man ſhould give an *Account in the Day of Judgment for every idle Word*, Mat. xii. 36. and if Men muſt render an Account to the righteous Judge of all the Earth, for every idle Word, how much more for groſs Enormities; and as I believe, that many of you are ſenſible, that ſome People's Children have been greatly hurt thro' keeping looſe and evil-minded Company, therefore I entreat, that you would watch carefully over your Children and Families, and endeavour

the Truth in the Purity of it, that you may be as ſo many Lights and Way-marks in the ſeveral Places where your Lots are caſt.

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endeavour to keep them from ſuch Company as may be a Snare to them; many young People have learn'd to talk idley and fooliſhly, and to drink to Excels, and game, and be proud and wanton, through keeping Company with them that were given to theſe Things, and how many who have kept ſuch Company, have married out of the Counſel of the Lord, to their own Ruin and Grief of their Religious Parents, but happy are they who learn from others Harms to beware: I wiſh that all you young People, into whoſe Hands theſe may come, may be careful to keep good and virtuous Company, for as many have been greatly hurt through keeping idle Company, ſo I believe many can ſay they have reapt great Profit and Comfort by keeping pious and virtuous People Company; I greatly deſire that you may humbly ſeek the Lord to preſerve you out of all the Evils and Corruptions that are in the World, and as you deſire that a Bleſſing may attend you, ſee that you obey your Parents in the Lord, as the Apoſtle adviſes, for many undutiful Children have brought great Ruin and Miſery upon themſelves, and Sorrow to their Parents; and as it was pleaſing to the Lord, that *Solomon* ſought for Wiſdom from the Lord, that he might

know

know how to behave himself before that great People, I desire, my Friends, that all of you that have Children and Families, to walk before, may wait for Wisdom from the Lord, that you may know how to behave your selves, and what to cherrish and what to suppress; and as many Children have been greatly hurt, through being too much indulged in high Things, and having their own Wills gratified; I desire that you may keep your Children out of high Things, that may lead away their Minds from the Lord, and keep your Authority over them in the meek Spirit of the Lamb, that you may keep their Love and Affection; many of our good Friends that have rul'd with Sweetness, their Children both love and fear them; but if any rule in a wrong Spirit and Temper, they may mightily sour their Children, and loose their Love and Affection, so that they may slight and disregard them, may the Lord guide you in His Wisdom and Counsel, that by your wise and prudent Conduct, you may be a Blessing to your Families, as many have been through their careful walking and good Endeavours: And I wish, that you may be examplary in attending of Religious Meetings for the Worship of God, and endea-

vour to bring your Children and Servants to frequent ſuch Meetings both on Firſt and Week Days, as much as you well can, and as it is certain, that God who is a Spirit, may be truly worſhiped in Spirit, when nothing is outwardly ſpoken, I would have you wait to be ſenſible thereof in your religious Meetings, that ſo they may be made truly comfortably and edifying to you; and if you wait to feel the Power of Chriſt in your ſilent Waiting, you will be encouraged to keep up your Meetings, and as you may read, how the Primitive Chriſtians were baptized into Chriſt, and ſo came to put on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the New and Heavenly Man, I very much deſire, that you may experience what it is to be baptized into the Divine and Heavenly Nature of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; and as you witneſs the Divine Nature to bear Rule in your Hearts, you will ſhew forth Chriſtianity in your Lives and Actions, and for this I am ſincere in my Deſires, that ſo you may anſwer the Kindneſs and Love of God, in viſiting you, and gathering you to be a People; and as you are ſenſible that we are but Sojourners here, and that the End of all fading Enjoyments are near at hand to us, therefore I tenderly deſire, that you may

may look beyond all theſe low Things, to the Reward which will not fade away, *If you are riſen with Chriſt*, ſaith the Apoſtle, *ſet your Affections on Things which are above*: Although it is lawful for Chriſtians to mind Earthly Things in their Places, yet we ought to be careful, that we do not mind theſe low Things too much, leaſt thereby we are diverted from ſeeking of the durable Treaſure, you find what a ſad Sentence went out againſt them that we read of in *Luke*, that were invited to the Supper, and made Excuſes; although the Things that they were taken up with, were lawful in themſelves, one had *married a Wife*, and another had *bought a Farm*, and a third, *Oxen*, and they all deſired to be excuſed; and we find, that becauſe they made Excuſes, the Lord of the Servant ſaid, *that none of them that were bidden ſhould taſte of his Supper*: Now this is left upon Record for our Inſtruction, may you all be truly redeemed out of the Love and Spirit and Friendſhip of the World, that you may ſenſibly witneſs what it is to have your Converſation in Heaven, and have inward Communion with the Lord, as the true Chriſtians of old had, while they were living in the World: We read, that *the Friendſhip of the World is Enmity with God*.

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As many good natured People have been greatly ensnared and drawn into drinking to Excess, through keeping too much Company with them that were given to hard Drinking, I tenderly desire, that you may all be very much upon your Guard against being ensnared this Way, for how many Men of bright Parts have shortned their Days through excessive Drinking; but live rather abstemiously, for as Temperance is a great Step towards Salvation, so it is likewise very conducing to Health, the Apostle *Paul* saith, that he *kept his Body under, least while he preached to others, he himself should become a Castaway*; it is greatly to be desired, that this were the Care not only of every Minister, but of all them who profess to be the Followers of Christ.

And my Friends, in all your Dealings remember that great Rule of our dear Lord, *viz. All things whatsoever you would that Men should do unto you, do you even so unto them*, that so you may answer the just and equal Principle in all with whom you have to do, many of our good Friends have brought great Reputation to their Profession, and Credit to themselves, by their fair and just Dealing, and peaceable Behaviour, and good Conversations; remember

remember that excellent Counſel of the Apoſtle, where he ſaith, Heb. xii. 14. *Follow Peace with all Men and Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord:* And be tender of one another's Reputations; and if any Friend or Brother be overtaken in a Fault, endeavour to reſtore him in the Spirit of Meekneſs, and watch in the Holy Light, which ſhews you the Evil and the Temptations of Satan, when they are preſented, that thereby you may be preſerved from joining with them.

So with Deſires that you may all be ſo conſtant upon your Watch, that he that envies your Happineſs, and that goes about continually, ſeeking who he can get in upon, may be fruſtrated in his Deſigns upon you. I remain your Friend and Brother in the TRUTH,

London the 12th of the 2d Month 1731. *Benjamin Holme.*

FINIS.

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